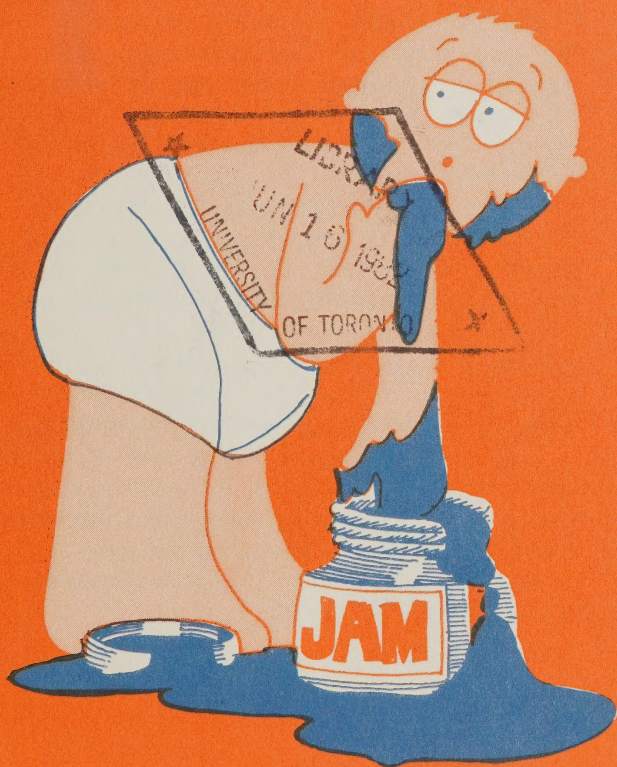


Discipline

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What?
When?
How?



Parents are People

Discipline is a confusing issue to many parents. “How strict should I be?” “Am I spoiling my child with too much love?” “Did I handle that properly?” “Which expert is right?” are common questions. Part of the confusion arises from what parents mean when they use the term ‘discipline’. Often they are really talking about ‘punishment’ which is but one part of discipline.

Punishment means a penalty inflicted for wrongdoing. It ranges from a mild reprimand or withdrawal of a privilege such as no television for a day, to corporal punishment, such as a spanking.

The term discipline implies something more positive. It has to do with guidance. *It is the training and teaching of your child about desired behavior, not just the controlling of undesired behavior.*

Thus some parents described as ‘strict’ or ‘disciplinarians’ may seldom or never use corporal punishment. And some parents who punish often, may actually be very poor at maintaining discipline.

The fact is there is no one right way to be a parent. Every family is unique.

Some parents feel guilty after disciplining children. Some accept behavior they dislike from their children because they believe discipline causes psychological damage. Some feel it is wrong to be angry with a child or to show anger.

But discipline is a necessary part of the parent-child relationship. It helps a child to become self-disciplined and self-confident. Living with children is not always easy, and it’s normal for parents to be angry occasionally.

Parents don’t always do what they know is best. Sometimes it’s too difficult. Perhaps they’re under stress. Sometimes they just haven’t enough energy.

Guidelines

The following guidelines may help you resolve some of the confusion you may have about discipline. They are generally accepted ways to discipline, based on what is known about children.

Consistency

Parents can't, or don't always want to be consistent. But children need to know what is expected of them. Stick by your decisions. If you change your mind, explain why. You might say, for example: "You're right, it's not very cold today. I guess you don't need your jacket," or "I've finished my cleaning already so we do have time to read a story."

Here are a few suggestions to help you maintain consistency.

- *Consider a request.* Don't answer with a hasty 'yes' or 'no', but once given, make your decision final.
- *Establish routines.* Young children benefit when they can predict their days. Schedule meals, baths, play period, and bedtimes.
- *Make rules.* Set only rules you feel are important. You will be more likely to succeed if you enforce them consistently.

Examples of rules are: "Toys must be put away before watching TV," and "Please sit at the table to crayon." State clearly what will happen if a rule is broken. For example, "If you crayon on the walls, I'll take the crayons away."

As children get older, let them participate in setting rules and in deciding what will happen if a rule is broken. This will let them feel they have rights. Chances are that fewer rules will be broken.

Follow through. Ensure that rules meet your wishes but don't deny your child's needs. "If you must yell, do it in your room." Make sure both parents agree on rules. Remember, it's natural for children to test rules.

Praise, Encourage

Children want to be noticed and continually seek approval from their parents. Tell your child what you expect. For example: "Paint on the paper, not on the walls." "You may play in the sandbox, but not in the flower garden." Be specific: "Hold on with two hands," rather than "Be careful." Notice and praise good behavior.

Encourage attempts as well as completed tasks. For example: "Good! You put your boots on by yourself." Speak positively: "If you get dressed quickly we'll go to the park," rather than, "If you don't hurry we won't go."

Set Examples

Children imitate those around them. If you swear when you are angry, your child will swear when angry. Try to handle situations yourself as you want your child to.

Make Reasonable Requests

Children are individuals and develop in their own way. Physical development and emotional maturity occur at different times. Before hastily disciplining, consider the following: perhaps your child is tired, sick, hungry, upset, or too young to do what you expect. For instance, most two-year-olds can't fully dress themselves.

Perhaps what you ask is at odds with the typical behavior of that age. For example, most four-year-olds can't sit still.

Perhaps your request is at odds with your child's personality. For example, adapting to new situations may be difficult. Your toddler may have some trouble sleeping in a new room. Or perhaps you have asked the impossible of your child. It's natural for children to be angry when faced with situations they can't handle.

Toddlers need to explore and handle everything. Channel their curiosity by providing objects and areas to explore, rather than saying 'no' outright.

Punishment

Children must be shown disapproval of unacceptable behavior. When speaking, holding or other forms of discipline fail to deal with misbehavior, other approaches must be considered. Some forms of punishment are: removal of a treat or privilege, short confinement to a room and verbal disapproval. Here are some suggestions to help you to punish effectively.

- Punishment should never be used to hurt children physically in order to make them 'pay' for something done wrong.
- Punish sparingly.
- Be logical. Relate punishment to the misbehavior. For example, if your child throws sand at a playmate, remove your child from the sandpile.
- Follow through on warnings.
- Punish immediately after the misbehavior.
- Speak sternly but calmly and as little as possible.

- Punish behavior, not self image: "I know you're angry, but hitting is bad. I won't let you hit your friend."
- After punishing, forgive and forget.

Realize that children may seek punishment if this is the only way they are noticed. This could lead to serious problems – lack of self-confidence, poor self-image, destructive behavior.

Spanking

Many parents resort to spanking when other forms of punishment fail.

However, spanking is generally *not* effective. Here's what is known about spanking.

- Spanking is bad modeling. It teaches a child to hit others.
- It can lead to a poor self-image.
- Frequent spanking may teach your child to learn ways to avoid 'getting caught'.
- It tends to lose its effectiveness when used too often, and may make your child feel bad and angry towards you.
- If a parent uses spanking often it indicates that he or she has lost control of the situation. This may show the child that the parent cannot cope with the problem, and this in turn can make the child frightened and insecure.

Self-Discipline

Children naturally strive to become independent. Developing independence demands that parents and children acquire patience, understanding and respect for one another.

Teaching self-discipline requires that parents become aware of their children as individuals with distinctive personalities and needs. And parents should remember that children mature at different rates.

Try to:

- Set limits but give freedom to learn.
- When possible, let children learn from experience. For example, a child who refuses to zip up a jacket or wear a hat on a cool day will soon want to warm up inside the home. Then the lesson about appropriate dress can be reinforced. The child's safety must, of course, always be considered.

As they get older:

- If a certain behavior bothers you, try to work out a solution with your child.
- Involve your child in setting rules. Give responsibility as soon as it can be handled.
- Allow your child to decide on routines for homework.
- If punishment is necessary, explain why. Say you disapprove, and agree on an appropriate punishment.

Remember

Take comfort in knowing that all parents occasionally have feelings of guilt, confusion and failure.

Don't let discipline interfere with the overall enjoyment you share with your child.

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